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Between Dissent and Power: The Transformation of Islamic Politics in the Middle East and Asia

KHOO BOO TEIK, VEDI HADIZ, and YOSHIHIRO NAKANISHI, eds.

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, xv+298p., index.

The key intervention this timely volume makes is to question whether political agitation that speaks in the name of Islam is best understood in terms of the Islamic content its exponents profess. In this respect, the titular choice to describe the volume as being about "Islamic" politics is no coincidence. To the contrary, it splits the difference between assuming that no more than a politics of actors who happen to be "Muslim" merits attention and assuming that their politics are overdetermined by Islam*ist* predilections/pronouncements. At the same time, as the editors' fine introductory chapter makes clear, the choice is also meant to provoke. This is because the collection prioritizes what the editors suggest are heretofore neglected political economy and institutional (political, sociological) perspectives on understanding recent events in the Muslim majority countries the volume surveys. Those countries—which include Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Malaysia, Pakistan, Algeria, and Indonesia—comprise the basis for the volume's nine case study chapters. The choice of case studies is governed by the volume's concern with tracing how Islamic politics has oscillated between "dissent" and "power," especially in the aftermath of the Arab spring.

After making requisite mention of the fact that the volume is intended to treat the Islamic character of politics in the places it surveys neither as "an epiphenomenon of economics" nor "the mere expression of religion," in their introductory chapter the editors instead proceed to highlight a series of so-called institutional factors. These include, first, capitalist development, economic crises, and their social consequences; second, the relative strengths of regimes, parties, and social movements; and, third, the shifting bases and constituencies of support and opposition (p. 4). Before proceeding to the nine case studies, the two chapters following the editors' introduction helpfully elaborate on the key crosscutting perspectives the volume seeks to use to illuminate relevant patterns and contrasts. In Chapter 2 ("Political Economy and the Explanation of the Islamic Politics in the Contemporary World") Richard Robison contrasts cultural and ideological approaches

to understanding "politics and society in Islamic countries" with several others (p. 21). Most important among these are the various strands of the political economy perspective Robison advocates. According to Robison, whether in its radicalized or party electoral form Islamic politics is thus best viewed in light of the confluence between class dynamics (e.g. by paying attention to phenomena like the "declining petty bourgeoisie") and shifting state structures (e.g. by paying attention to the move from "market authoritarian rule" to "the embrace of modern market"). Chapter 3 by Vedi Hadiz ("The Organizational Vehicles of Islamic Political Dissent: Social Bases, Genealogies and Strategies") complements Robison's chapter nicely. Not only does it bring the volume closer to the ground of how Islamic politics is actually undertaken, it also still focuses on developing a set of generalized explanatory resources to clarify the particular approach the volume as a whole means to pursue. Noting that the titular "organizational vehicles" the chapter is focused on vary greatly from full fledged political parties to small and isolated cells engaged in terrorist activity, Hadiz emphasizes that the vehicles of "Islamic dissent" must be understood in relation to "transformations in the social bases of Islamic politics" over the last half century. Hadiz contrasts the shared desire expressed by many parties for "a variant of capitalism" (p. 47) with the rise of "organizing from the fringes" when such mainstream Islamic forces "fail to build coalitions that can plausibly challenge for state power through the formal political arena" (p. 50).

Yasuyuki Matsunaga's fourth chapter turns to the first case study on Iran ("Islamic Dissent in Iran's Full-Fledged Islamic Revolutionary State"). Matsunaga's main goal is to treat political dissent "relationally" as a form "of adversary relations between sets of contending actors" (p. 66). More specifically his focus is on what he calls "post-*revivalist*" forms of Islamic dissent that were highly visible in Iran before the end of the Islamic Revolution's second decade (in the late 1990s). After providing relevant context, he looks especially closely at Mohsen Kadivar's brand of post-revivalist Islamic dissent and its rejection of the connection between politics and religion. Chapter 5 by Jenny White is entitled "Muslimhood and Post-Islamist Power: The Turkish Example." Like most of the country studies White's is also principally a narrative-based account of contemporary Islamic political agitators (in Turkey) as told from the standpoint of recent events, with a healthy dose of broader contextualizing discussion of earlier periods as well. The main analytical intervention of the chapter is to draw out several "principles" from the Turkish case that may be relevant to Arab countries as well. These include the following: a) that Islam undergoes a transformation as a defining identity once "enmeshed in the democratic process in the context of a globalized economy"; b) that parties embracing a "privatized Islam" are best able to expand constituencies; c) that gaining official power tends to involve "the loss of the social movement aspect of earlier party incarnations"; and d) that the introduction of greater conservatism or religiosity into government and secular state institutions is not inevitable due to the "anxiety and push-back" it inspires among secularists (pp. 90–91).

Housam Darwisheh's contribution in Chapter 6 looks at the "The Political Transformation of

the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt." The chapter's informative narrative takes the reader up to the present. Analytically, the chapter is connected to the volume's wider themes through its conclusion that revolutionary forces in Egypt did not ultimately sour against the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood after the Tahrir Square uprising due to the fear that it would institute an "Islamic state." Rather it was the Brotherhood's "tendency to act unilaterally" and its perceived attempt to create "a shift form pluralist, inclusive politics towards a monopoly of power" that made its regime suspect (p. 130). Chapter 7 by Nadia Marzouki looks at "Islamist Ideals and Governing Realities" through examining "Nahda's Project and the Constraint of Adaptation in Post-Revolution Tunisia." Over and above the narrative survey Marzouki provides, the chapter focuses on the ideas of Rached Ghannouchi, Nahda's leader, emphasizing the concept of the civil state (*dawla madaniyya*) through which he has argued for a compatibility between Islam and democracy. The chapter takes the reader up to the end of Nahda's first coalition government in 2013.

Shoko Watanabe's chapter comes next and is entitled "Reforming the Regime or Reforming the Dissidents? The Gradualist Dissent of Islamic Movements in Morocco." Observing that Morocco's Islamic movements have been distinguished by their "gradualist' nature" (p. 154), Watanabe's looks at events over the last several decades draw attention to the resilience of the so-called *Makhzan* structure of Morocco's deep state. Watanabe emphasizes how the central state has thus remained the dominant player in Moroccan politics through a "divide and conquer" approach to Islamic movements. The state's use of strategic "inclusion" and "exclusion" of such forces, Watanabe argues, is more significant than any dichotomy between "moderate" and "radical" Islamic forces (p. 171).

Khoo Boo Teik's chapter is the first of the case studies that takes the reader outside of the worlds of the Middle East and North Africa and looks at "Social Transformation and the Reinventions of Parti Islam in Malaysia." The first main topic he considers is the political economic forces underlying social transformation in Malaysia, here emphasizing that the Parti Islam SeMalyasia (PAS) did not arise as a response to "failed developmentalism" as in many other Muslim majority countries. From here the chapter goes on to consider the social origins of Islamic politics and provides a narrative of the PAS's oscillation from the early 1980s between "strident Islamism and fortuitous religiosity." The author emphasizes that it was only after the early 2000s—after the retirement of Prime Minister Mahathir—that anger at the ruling party and oligarchic character of the country's politics allowed the PAS to finally break through (by 2006–07). As Khoo details, this breakthrough took place through a "confluence of dissent" and a larger ethos of *Reformasi* that the PAS was then able to capitalize on.

The last three chapters both continue to keep us outside of the Middle East and North Africa with discussion of Pakistan and Indonesia and also bring us back to the region with the chapter on Algeria. Chapter 10 by Yoshihiro Nakanishi is entitled "Political Fragmentation and Islamic Politics in Pakistan." Nakanishi starts by providing a primarily contextualizing historical survey of the

genesis of contemporary Islamic politics in Pakistan. The chapter then proceeds to focus most intently on the period since 2000, while also including a section elaborating on "the weakness" of Islamic parties that brings the reader back to Pakistan's origins in 1947. Other sections consider the role of Islam as both security tool and threat after the coup of General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 and the ensuing war on terror years as well as a consideration of the relationship between social change, Islam, and political dissent. The chapter concludes open-endedly, noting that "current Islamization" will not necessarily bring about a radical transformation into a state wholly governed by "Islamic principles like Shariah" even if, at the same time, the potency of Islamic militant groups is likely only to increase.

The chapter bringing us back westward is Alejandro Colás' and is entitled "A Perverse Symbiosis: The State, Islam and Political Dissent in Contemporary Algeria." Colás frames the country's experience as exceptional given the "circular quality to" its history of Islam and political dissent. Colás thus emphasizes how Algeria continues to be run by "a narrow military-bureaucratic oligarchy which has staked its survival on the distribution of hydrocarbon wealth to curry political favor form supporters and contenders alike" (p. 244). It is for these reasons that Colás suggests the regime has been able to "snuff out" the ripple effects of the Arab Spring. In keeping with these claims, the chapter's narrative focuses on the last 20 years of Algeria's history, in the wake of the defeat of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). In the wake of the FIS' suppression, Colás argues that the Bouteflika regime has been able to successfully deploy "co-option strategies" to "incorporate aspects of the Islamist programme and some of its 'accomodationist' personnel into the *bricolage* of the regime itself" (p. 244).

Ian Wilson's final chapter brings us back eastward, turning to Indonesia, and is entitled "Morality Racketeering: Vigilantism and Populist Islamic Militancy in Indonesia." Wilson discusses "Islamic vigilante groups" in the country and emphasizes how rather than seeking to overturn or radically transform the state they have pursued "a socially conservative 'anti-vice' and 'anti-apostasy' agenda against perceived liberal excesses" (p. 248). The chapter's empirical focus is on the Defenders of Islam Front (FPI) as well as certain other vigilante groups in Jakarta. Wilson argues that theirs is a "pragmatic Islamic militancy" that appeals to the urban poor as its most active membership (p. 249). Wilson's narrative reviews the rise of vigilantism by situating it in the local contexts of post-authoritarian Indonesia after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. The chapter goes on to discuss the FPI's history, relationship to other Islamic organizations, and the class tensions that it has been able to feed on.

As a closing chapter, Wilson's is another that gives voice to the volume's overall concern with questioning how important normative Islamic ideas (or, simply, ideas adverting to be drawn from the normative Islamic tradition) are to real politics. Certainly, there can be no doubt that such a view is refreshing and even necessary when considered relative to so much popular and even academic discussion. Clearly, it is untenable (and, perhaps, suspect in still other ways) for com-

mentators to become as selectively idealist as they often do when it comes to understanding politics and politicized violence in the Muslim world. That said, as vital as any such corrective must be, it is also limited by its own will to correct. After all, there would be nothing to correct if Islamic politics was, indeed, no more than the politics of Muslim actors. A more head-on interrogation of how the practice of dissent and power in the Muslim-majority world has, does, and will likely continue to be "determined" also by the Islamic or purportedly Islamic content of its practitioners' ideas remains necessary. While no single edited volume can address all issues, it would be a mistake to imagine that the volume under review—as valuable as it is—suffers only from the limits of space. So too, the reader should remain aware, are certain limits imposed, and relevant questions that are unlikely to go away obscured by its preferred explanatory approach.

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"Good Coup" Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Developments since Thaksin's Downfall

Pavin Chachavalpongpun, ed.
Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014, xv+290p.

Come back, General Sonthi—all is forgiven! The 2006 coup may have turned bad, but compared with the 2014 coup it now looks positively benign. This useful edited volume appeared just in time to serve as a primer for what went wrong in the wake of the previous military seizure of power. But apart from one chapter on the military, the focus of the book is not on the coup itself, but on a range of related actors and issues. The book is divided into four sections of two or three chapters: the impact of the coup on Thailand's political landscape; the military and the monarchy; the emergence of yellow and red politics; and crises of legitimacy. In a sparse field, the volume is an invaluable addition to reading lists (I have already assigned it to my students), but some chapters are stronger than others, and several of them go over ground that the same authors have already covered in previous writings. To my mind the first two sections are much the most useful, and Thongchai Winichakul's chapter on monarchy and anti-monarchy stands out as the centerpiece of the book.

Thongchai's argument can be distilled into one provocative and important assertion: the Thai monarchy, far from serving as a source of stability, lies at the core of the country's persistent instability and regular recourse to mass bloodshed, as seen in the four violent crackdowns of 1973, 1976, 1992, and 2010. Offering a brilliant exegesis of a provocative speech by redshirt leader Nattawut Saikua in 2008 about the contrast between the earth and the sky, Thongchai demonstrates